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## BOOK REVIEWS

SHAKESPEARE'S THEATER. By Ashley H. Thorndike. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916. xiv+472 pp.

Professor Thorndike's *Shakespeare's Theater*, instead of being, as one may possibly suppose from reading the title, a discussion merely of the structure and equipment of the Elizabethan playhouse, is a comprehensive survey of "all the information that we possess in regard to the theater of Shakespeare's time." Consequently the book, in addition to the full chapters on the playhouses and the methods of stage presentation, contains chapters dealing with the general stage history of the period, Shakespeare's London, the dramatists and the dramatic companies of the era, governmental regulations of the drama, Elizabethan actors and acting, and the audience. The volume also contains a large number of valuable illustrations, an interesting collection of stage directions illustrating the uses of the curtains and the inner stage, and a well-chosen list of books and articles dealing with Shakespeare's theatre.

In attempting to cover such an enormous field, Professor Thorndike has done remarkably well. Unlike many "surveys," his book is complete and abreast of the times. Though certain scholars may regret that limitations of space forbade his giving more fully his reasons for holding conclusions contrary to their own, and though a few specialists may lament that he has not attempted to settle such vexing problems as stage lighting, hours of performance, and theatrical music, he has wisely, no doubt, chosen to devote most of his energy to a general discussion of more important matters.

In dealing with the vast amount of uncertainty which needs must find a place in any book dealing with Shakespeare's theatre Professor Thorndike is, as a rule, especially careful. In his discussion of the much-disputed problem of staging he is more liberal and less combative than most students of the subject; he is even hopeful that the opposing factions—"alternationists" and advocates of simultaneous settings—may soon effect a lasting compromise. But the very chapter in which this hope is ex-

pressed will, I predict, call forth more dissenting voices than any other chapter in his book; for Professor Thorndike's theory of staging, a modified and more sensible form of the theory recently set forth by Albright, will continue to appeal to many as being too regular and systematic in its perfection, too lavish in its demands on the stage curtains, too insistent on confining heavy properties—notably trees—to the inner stage, too strict in its demand that the stage rarely represent two distinct localities simultaneously. He sanely admits that there were exceptions to the system of stage presentation which he advocates, and he grants that it was not perfected until about 1600 or later, but in spite of these exceptions and restrictions, he still leans too heavily on Albright to satisfy those who have approached the public stage from the point of view of mediæval drama and the court rather than from the point of view of the Restoration theatre.

Now although I am not what Professor Thorndike calls "an extreme advocate of incongruity," and although I believe his theory as to a development in the methods of presenting plays to be in a large measure correct, I also believe that the anti-alternationists will have considerable ground for complaint against his discussion. His treatment at least gives the impression that he has overemphasized apparent survivals of Elizabethan methods in the staging of the Restoration period at the expense of the influence exerted upon the public theatre of Shakespeare's time by mediæval practices and by contemporary court and continental methods. When the Restoration theatres opened, they no doubt carried on various features of stage presentation employed at the closing of the theatres in 1642, but most of these features, there is good reason to believe, were such as had been occasioned by the employment of "scenes" on the court and university stages, and even in regular London theatres prior to 1642. Just when and to what extent simultaneous settings gave place to a regular method of staging which resembles more nearly the methods employed in Restoration plays and modern melodramas, it is obviously impossible to say. But in discussing such matters one important consideration, it seems to me, must be borne constantly in mind: The fact that a few dramas were presented in the

regular London theatres during the period 1590-1610 in the manner advocated by the "extreme advocates of incongruity," is proved by evidence that is clear, direct, and unmistakable; and on the other hand that a single play during the same period was staged in the manner described by Professor Thorndike in his analysis of such dramas as *The Yorkshire Tragedy* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, is indicated by evidence that is largely, if not entirely, presumptive.

Though Professor Thorndike is very careful in his treatment of uncertainties, there are in his book certain uncompromising statements which, I believe, are at least debatable; such, for instance, as his contention (p. 5) that the "peculiar nature of the physical stage of Shakespeare's time is the result of the development in the professional theaters, and little affected by court practice," and the assertion (p. 23) that footlights were not used until the Restoration. It is surely not unreasonable to think that more than one feature of that extremely elastic stage which Professor Thorndike says was in operation as early as 1576 may have been suggested to Burbage and his fellows by their experiences with the types of stage employed at court; and there is some reason to think that the so-called Red Bull picture represents pre-Restoration conditions in the matter of stage lights. I may say here incidentally that, so far as I know, there is no evidence to prove that footlights were employed in the Restoration theatres. It may also be mentioned here that the statement that the Red Bull "alone carried the traditions of the open-air public theaters into the period after the Restoration" (p. 60) is surely doubtful, in view of Mr. W. J. Lawrence's evidence (*Fortnightly Review*, May, 1916) that this theatre had been roofed before 1660.

A few of Professor Thorndike's statements are open to more serious doubt. The opinion, for example, that the Swan was probably designed to be used as a bear-garden as well as a place for plays (p. 59) is clearly at variance with the early statements of travellers in England, such as Hentzner, DeWitt, and Platter, who carefully distinguish the theatres from the bear-garden; and Platter, in 1599, expressly states that the place for bear-baiting is entirely different in structure from the theatres (*Anglia* XXII,

460). There are the best of reasons for thinking that, with the exception of the Hope, which apparently proved a failure in this respect, no regular Elizabethan playhouse was used for both drama and bear-baiting during the same period of its existence. In this connection, Professor Thorndike's statement (p. 41) that for years after the permanent theatres were built plays were given in "the places for bear baiting" is, it seems to me, too sweeping. An occasional play may have been given at the Bear Garden, but the evidence for any such performances is both extremely scanty and questionable. Again, the drastic order against plays in London which Professor Thorndike, following Dean Gildersleeve, assigns to the year 1582 (p. 228), seems to have been issued somewhat earlier, as shown by the documents printed by Mrs. Stopes (Harrison's *Description of England*, IV, 320); and he apparently accepts (p. 201 n.) Dean Gildersleeve's statement regarding the April (1559) proclamation against plays, a statement which is surely inaccurate (see *Modern Philology*, IX, 545).

Not so objectionable are a few assertions that are a little misleading in that they are a trifle too sweeping. Speaking of the private theatres, he writes (p. 128) that "the stage was now indoors, without a special heaven and without pillars." This is true only in so far as the word *heaven* means a special cover for the stage, for the Blackfriars, as we learn from the Duke of Newcastle's *The Variety* (pub. 1649), had a "Players heaven" to which gallants could ascend by means of a throne and there drink healths in the "clouds." Likewise the words (p. 184) with reference to masques—"curiously the front curtain does not seem ever to have been lowered in order to hide the shifting"—must be slightly modified in view of the description of the arch and "prospective of ruins" employed in Nabbes' *Microcosmus*, published in 1637, as presented at Salisbury Court. This particular "perspective of ruins," it will be remembered, was "drawne still before the other scenes whilst they varied." It is curious indeed that the court stage was so tardy in using the front curtain to conceal the shifting of scenes, if, as Professor Thorndike argues, the public theatres had long since perfected a system of staging by which all heavy properties were regularly

confined to the inner stage and their shifting concealed by curtains.

A few possible errors of omission may also be mentioned. The discussion of the Fortune Theatre (pp. 57-58) must be supplemented by W. J. Lawrence's recent *Restoration Stage Nurseries* (*Herrig's Archiv*, 1915, pp. 301-315); and in spite of Professor Thorndike's assertion that his bibliography is not intended to be complete, one is nevertheless surprised to find that it does not include such works as Schelling's *The Elizabethan Playhouse* (*Pub. of Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of America*, 1910), and the discussions of the Elizabethan stage found in certain volumes of the Porter and Clarke edition of Shakespeare folios. More serious, it seems to me, is the failure to make use of Serlio's book on architecture, a work which was published as early as 1548 and which no doubt exercised more or less influence on the Elizabethan court stage. In a book which purports to be "virtually the first effort at a systematic survey of the relations between the court and public theaters" of the Elizabethan period, many students would be pleased to possess reproductions of the extremely interesting diagrams of a stage which Serlio found practicable and his no less interesting designs of the various stage settings advocated in the well-known passage by Vitruvius. Serlio's book, it may be added, is accessible, both in the original and Peake's 1611 translation, in the Boston Public Library.

Finally, it may be pointed out that Professor Thorndike's volume, in spite of its weight, is an attractive piece of book-making. One noteworthy misprint, however is to be found on page 204, where the famous law against rogues and vagabonds is dated 1872.

But enough of what may be regarded as petty fault-finding. As a whole, *Shakespeare's Theater* is an excellent general survey of a large and difficult subject, and as such should be owned by all students of the Elizabethan period.

T. S. GRAVES.

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